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MEMORY IN MISSISSIPPI: IMAGINING WOMEN'S PLACE IN INTERWAR POLITICAL  
CULTURE

A Thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of History  
The University of Mississippi

by

Rachel McLemore

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the efforts of three groups of Mississippi women in pursuit of expanded electoral rights for women during the interwar years. The Mississippi chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs, and the Mississippi State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs worked to protect and PURSUE voting rights after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. This thesis focuses on memory as a particularly effective method they employed on behalf of their goals. Each group crafted and took advantage of distinct memory traditions to establish a foundation for women as voting citizens.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several people have had a hand in the completion of this project. Thanks first, to my parents, for their unwavering support and assistance. The faculty in the History Department at the University of Mississippi have provided an open and nurturing learning environment and I owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr. Charles Reagan Wilson, Dr. Deirdre Cooper Owens, and Dr. John Neff for serving as my thesis committee. Their guidance and advice greatly improved my efforts. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Payne for her suggestions and encouragement, especially in light of her sabbatical. Finally, my fellow graduate students made this experience so much better with their advice, interest, and encouragement.

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## INTRODUCTION

### MISSISSIPPI'S WOMEN

Mississippi, like most other southern states, has largely been left out of histories of the struggle for women's suffrage and histories of early women's electoral politics. Even in books devoted to uncovering the significance of the South in these histories, Mississippi is often relegated to the role of ultra-conservative opposition state and left mostly unexplored.<sup>1</sup> Although Mississippi's legislature did not ratify the Nineteenth Amendment until 1984 (the last state to do so), Mississippi's women were politically active decades earlier. This thesis in part seeks to explore one of these preceding periods of civic engagement. In focusing on the interwar period, roughly 1920 to 1940, I also intend to contribute to a woefully understudied period of U.S. women's history. Since Anne Firor Scot in the mid-1980s, women's historians have aspired to reclaim the "after suffrage" period from earlier historians who declared the women's movement suspended after the Nineteenth Amendment until the 1970s. These histories often concentrate on what women accomplished as voters after 1920, almost presupposing that the fight for the vote

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women and Gender in the New South*. Lorraine Gates Schuyler, "*The Weight of Their Votes*". Roslyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920*. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South*.

ended for many women with ratification.<sup>2</sup> This thesis examines one strategy—memory—employed by some women in Mississippi to protect and extend women’s suffrage in the interwar period, instead of how women used the vote and how successful they were in enacting their social and civic programs.<sup>3</sup>

Despite widespread consensus that many Southern women saw their role in society as vessels of culture and social values, historians have largely looked at organizations specifically chartered to protect and disseminate collective memory. The largest such group in Mississippi was the state chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), a Confederate memorial organization that spread information and constructed monuments to Confederate heroes.<sup>4</sup> I contend that other women’s clubs, in this study the Mississippi Federation of Clubwomen (MFWC) and the Mississippi State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs (MSFCWC), also availed themselves of memory traditions, especially when trying to advance the franchise for women.

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<sup>2</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *Myth and Southern History*, chapter 6. Kristi Anderson, *After Suffrage*. Wendy B. Sharer, *Vote and Voice*. Scott describes how southern women looked to change the definition of “southern lady” to suit their purposes after ratification. Anderson and Sharer represent the group of academics who analyze the effects women voters had on policy after the Nineteenth Amendment.

<sup>3</sup> This study focuses on clubwomen, white and black, who tended to be middle- or upper-class. The organizational structures these groups had in place lends itself to this research, particularly the central power structure and magazine production.

<sup>4</sup> Karen Cox, *Dixie’s Daughter’s*. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past*. Anne Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky*. Alice Fah and Joan Waugh, *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture*. Caroline Janney, *Burying the Dead But Not the Past*. Montgomery, Rebecca. “Lost Cause Mythology in New South Reform: Gender, Class, and Race and the Politics of Patriotic Citizenship in Georgia, 1890-1925.”



Memory is a particularly useful area of study because it can show how a group situates itself historically, elucidating their connections to the past and to their envisioned future, as well as their position in contemporary society. Two sociologists provided theories essential to understanding the power and transfer of memory. Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora were the first academics to explore the function and creation of collective memory. Their work explains, in part, the strength memory lent the clubwomen's suffrage campaigns in the interwar period. In his groundbreaking work, *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs defined collective memory and explored its creation and transmission. Halbwachs makes the central argument that human memory functions exclusively within a collective. As Halbwachs explains, "while the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as groups who remember."<sup>5</sup> Historical and autobiographical memory, as the two types identified by Halbwachs, both require a group setting for sustenance. Individuals in a group "draw on that context to remember or recreate the past," thus, "every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time."<sup>6</sup> Based on the definition and requirements proposed by Halbwachs, collective memory is a socially constructed notion as well. Halbwachs argues that two types of memory, historical and biographical, exist. Historical memory "reaches the social actor only through written records and other types of records, such as photography" and is

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<sup>5</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1992), 48.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 22 & 84.

supported by participation in commemorative activities.<sup>7</sup> Autobiographical memory is the memory of events personally experienced. Autobiographical memory is as much dependent on the group as historical memory because “only group members remember, and this memory nears extinction if they do not get together over long periods of time.”<sup>8</sup> Memory, both historical and autobiographical, must be actively produced and maintained. In that same vein, those groups can then use memory that is shaped by individuals and groups to further their present goals. In addition to, or perhaps because of the active role of the group in remembering, Halbwachs sees memory as inextricably related to the present. Throughout *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs “seeks to show how the present situation affects the selective perception of past history.”<sup>9</sup> Those who remember have no “blank page” upon which the memory is projected but rather the “present situation affects the selective perception of past history.”<sup>10</sup> The UDC, a group heavily focused on memory production and proliferation, used memories of the Confederate women to make a space for Mississippi’s women in the state’s political space. The MFWC focused on a memory tradition that highlighted the deservedness of women for that same purpose. Having a different battle to fight, the MSFCWC used yet another tradition by focusing on what the past could contribute to the future. Keeping in mind Halbwachs’ theory, the memory that Mississippi’s

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 33-34.

clubwomen chose to use in the interwar period was directly tied to their goals of the time. Their desire to promote woman suffrage colored their presentations of memory.

Pierre Nora expands upon Halbwachs's theories in "Between Memory and History," published in 1989. Memory, Nora explains, "only accommodates those facts that suit it."<sup>11</sup> This assertion corresponds with Halbwachs's theory about the relationship between the group and memory. Nora claims that "memory is blind to all but the group it binds," supporting Halbwachs's argument that as many memories exist as do groups.<sup>12</sup> Memory, therefore, is "by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual."<sup>13</sup> Members of a group, then, control what comprises their memories to a certain extent.

The theory most associated with Nora is the idea of *lieux de memoire*, roughly translated to sites of memory. According to Nora, a *lieu de memoire* is "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community."<sup>14</sup> Essentially, *lieux de memoire* are any physical or theoretical "sites: to which collective memory attributes symbolic meaning." These sites of memory, Nora argues, "originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize

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<sup>11</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between History and Memory," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 8.

celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills” because these sites do not naturally spring into being without intervention.<sup>15</sup> *Lieux de memoire* are socially constructed like the memories they represent. Nora’s theories apply especially to the UDC’s memorial efforts. The UDC was devoted to preserving and spreading what they considered the true memory of the Civil War and manipulated lieux de memoire in a particularly effective way to do so. The MFWC and the MSFCWC both engaged in the creation of sites of memory in a less conspicuous and pervasive way. These groups both made civic and social improvements the primary focus of their efforts, so while members contributed to memorial efforts and even some physical monuments, their *lieux de memoire* should primarily be classified as theoretical.

Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora explained the processes of memory creation and transmission in their theoretical work on the subject. Most importantly, they illustrate the importance of memory and its effects. Mississippi’s women’s civic clubs tapped into a collective memory to legitimate their stances on women’s rights. The publications, productions, and community activities of the respective groups reflect the memory tradition invoked.<sup>16</sup> The UDC employed memory to protect a traditional social role for white women but advocated for their right to vote as “deserving” citizens. The MFWC availed themselves of memory that highlighted the need for women’s public voice and their potential for positive and unique contributions in the political arena. The MSFCWC chose to stress the connection between past sacrifices and present

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>16</sup> I consulted several resources in Mississippi. Please see the attached document for a detailed list of archives and collections.

and future successes to demonstrate the continued improvement of the African American community.

Throughout their history, the United Daughters of the Confederacy crafted, then made explicit appeals to the Lost Cause tradition; the 1920s and 1930s proved no different in that regard.<sup>17</sup> In their efforts to memorialize the Confederacy and educate their contemporaries, the UDC presented a particular version of the past that focused on states' rights and a romanticization of the antebellum period. Several secondary sources address the activities of the UDC, paying particular attention to their memorialization and education endeavors and the relationship to their views on race, politics, and culture. In spite of the number of works pertaining to the UDC, memory, and the Lost Cause, little has been written about their use of memory as it related to women's rights. Of particular interest is the Mississippi chapter's reticence to erect monuments for women or to memorialize women's efforts in the Civil War until ratification.<sup>18</sup>

Scholars have also written a great deal about the public political lives of women immediately after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. Much of this secondary

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<sup>17</sup> For more information on the United Daughters of the Confederacy, both in Mississippi and the rest of the nation see Mary Poppenheim's *The History of the United Daughters of the Confederacy*, Caroline Janney's *Burying the Dead but Not the Past* and Karen Cox's *Dixie's Daughters*.

<sup>18</sup> The UDC constructed their first monument to women in Mississippi in 1917. It was designed by Belle Kearney. This should serve as a reminder not to paint women's organizations with too broad a stroke because Belle Kearney was one of the first women elected to office in Mississippi despite belonging to a conservative organization. Turner describes the antisuffrage activities of the UDC in *Gender and the New South*.

material deals with the specific actions undertaken or attempts to answer questions about the success or failures of the women's movement after 1920 rather than the ways women sought to encourage acceptance of women's suffrage. These histories often describe groups like the MFWC to illustrate the goals, like street cleaning and playground construction, that women hoped to accomplish with suffrage.<sup>19</sup> The MFWC was essentially an organization for other organizations. Women's clubs across Mississippi joined the federation for increased resources, better impact, and information exchange. Although memorialization was not their focus in the same way that it was for the UDC, the member groups and the state organization did participate in memory-construction and disbursal. In examining Mississippi's women's civic organizations and their women's rights activism, I hope to expose the broader societal fabric in which women's groups operated. At the very least these groups were aware of each other but sometimes were in direct dialogue with one another. In some cases, Mississippi women crossed between groups or held several memberships at the same time. This contact could have affected the way these groups chose to ground their arguments in memory and Mississippi's culture.

I intend to address two main questions in this thesis. First, what kind of people did each group target and how did that affect their use of memory? Second, were these women appealing to the same memory or making use of different collective memories? The answers to these questions shed light on the state of women in Mississippi during the inter-

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<sup>19</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady from Pedestal to Politics*. Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*. Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage*.

war period, a time that many scholars have concluded was either no different for women than before 1920 or was, in fact, worse.<sup>20</sup> Instead, I contend that the activities of Mississippi's women's civic groups point to some women's growing influence on public life.

These political gains for white women occurred against the backdrop of Jim Crow in Mississippi. This manifested in the use of explicitly racist and coded language in the arguments and memories of the white women's civic groups. Additionally, African American women in Mississippi formed their own civic organizations, collectively in the Mississippi State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. Although their own access to electoral rights was inhibited by their race, these women nonetheless provided a competing memory tradition in their civic efforts. Interestingly, the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs was not only aware of the MSFCWC, but in contact with them and sharing updates with MFWC members through *The Southern Magazine*, the statewide publication of the MFWC. In the final chapter, I explore the actions and writings of African American clubwomen in Mississippi to fully illustrate the memory-constructing activities of civically engaged women in Mississippi in the interwar period. The story of the black clubwomen of the South is often told in terms of the obstacles they encountered and the

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<sup>20</sup> See *Weight of Their Votes*, p. 240, footnote 5. According to Schuyler, Anne Firor Scott's *The Southern Lady* and William Chafe's *American Woman* provide good examples of this line of argument while Theda Skocpol's *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* argues that women were more powerful prior to their enfranchisement.

failures they experienced.<sup>21</sup> I do not intend to deny this story, but instead to consider the work the members of the MSFCWC undertook. Despite the fight for voting rights in Mississippi, the MSFCWC was engaged in a nationwide network of African American women devoted to improving the status of their race and to spreading women's suffrage as a means of doing so. Even though Mississippi's black clubwomen had to work within the confines of their local society, they were able to participate in the national program and incorporate some strategies into their state efforts. These women fought for their electoral rights and used the formation of their own collective memory as a method of ensuring those rights. When invoking memory, the MSFCWC concentrated on what the past meant for the future, for instance, the young people educated during the career of the deceased, the lessons taught by the lives of clubwomen, and the continuation of their work. Since they possessed limited recognizable power for much of their past, the MSFCWC stayed focused on the future, even in their memory tradition.

To understand the memory tradition each group of Mississippi clubwomen crafted, I examined their organization's magazines and newsletters. The Mississippi chapter of the UDC circulated *Our Heritage* as the official organ of their organization. The Mississippi UDC also distributed historical yearbooks or accounts of state business and proposed meeting themes. The southern regional division of UDC published *The Southern Magazine* and

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<sup>21</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow*. Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*. Anne Meis Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*. Gilmore is blunt about the inherent tragedy in the story she imparts about middle class black women in North Carolina while Wolcott and Knupfer also primarily describe the hardships encountered by these women.



Mississippians subscribed and contributed articles. The MFWC printed *Mississippi Women's Magazine* for their members. Like the UDC, the state organization and individual clubs published historical yearbooks annually. The MSFCWC did not publish their own magazine but Mississippi women were involved in the production of the NACW magazine, *The National Notes*, and its regional counterpart, *The Southern Herald*. Throughout the interwar period Anita Dean Zuber of West Point, Mississippi served on the publication boards of both periodicals. This allowed her to actively participate in the selection of articles for print.

This approach allows for an examination of the collective memory tradition these groups embraced and their descriptions of how members shared information with each other and non-members indicates the clubs' effects outside of the groups. Relying heavily on group-produced materials does have its limitations, however. Other than the thoughts of authors and editors, magazines, newsletters, and yearbooks do not contain individual opinions so these conclusions are based on a subset of the group. To offset this constraint, I have attempted to include records such as donations, subscription numbers, and reports of meetings to confirm the widespread belief in the ideas espoused in these articles.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE UNITED DAUGHTERS OF THE CONFEDERACY

In 1923, Nellie Nugent Howorth took her seat in the Mississippi House of Representatives. After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, Howorth ran for office at her earliest opportunity, the 1922 elections.<sup>22</sup> Although this may seem surprising given Mississippi's history of restrictive voting policies and Mississippi's refusal to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, Mississippi's civic-minded women laid a foundation in the interwar period, from 1920 and through the next two decades, that encouraged the participation of white women in Mississippi electoral politics and the acceptance of that participation by many Mississippians.<sup>23</sup> The United Daughters of the Confederacy was one such women's civic group that worked to make a place for white women in Mississippi's political culture. By using their existing memorialization strategies, the UDC crafted a legacy of political and social involvement that emphasized the earlier contributions of women. This tradition allowed the Mississippi

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<sup>22</sup> See Joanne Varner Hawks, "Like Mother, Like Daughter: Nellie Nugent Somerville and Lucy Somerville Howorth," Joanne Varner Hawks, Mary Carolyn Ellis, and J. Byron Morris, "Women in the Mississippi Legislature (1924-1981)" and Dorothy Shawhan and Martha H. Swain, *Lucy Somerville Howorth: New Deal Lawyer, Politician, and Feminist from the South*.

<sup>23</sup> While several histories offer a general overview of Jim Crow in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century South, I consulted Glenda Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow*, Kathleen Blee's *Women of the Klan*, and Louise Michelle Newman's *White Women's Rights*.

Division of the UDC to advocate for the continued and increased participation of Mississippi's white women in electoral politics. The UDC saw women's suffrage as a positive political tool in the interwar period but Mississippi chose not to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment.<sup>24</sup> In the face of extreme opposition from many men and women, the UDC and other women's civic groups had to prepare Mississippians to accept women at the polls. Many histories of the women's movement either end in 1920 because the Nineteenth Amendment was passed or begin in the post-war period with an eye toward second wave feminism. Historians in the past have resigned the 1920s and 1930s to footnotes because of what they considered a lack of coordinated action on the part of women. Until recently, even those few historians like Susan Ware who examined women in politics in the 1920s and 1930s failed to incorporate the South into their stories. This thesis builds off Lorraine Gates Schuyler's *"The Weight of Their Votes": Southern Women and Political Leverage in the 1920s*.<sup>25</sup> Where Gates seeks to expand the definition of political in her study, this work intends to examine how Mississippi's women used collective memory to make space for women in the traditional political sphere. Additionally, I consider the UDC in the interwar period, a sorely understudied time in their history.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Mississippi did not ratify the Nineteenth Amendment until March 22, 1984. It was the last of the forty-eight states to do so.

<sup>25</sup> Schuyler, *"The Weight of Their Votes."*

<sup>26</sup> Mary Poppenheim's *The History of the United Daughters of the Confederacy*, Caroline Janney's *Burying the Dead but Not the Past* and Karen Cox's *Dixie's Daughters*. Most of these histories stop in 1920 or earlier, alleging that the prestige of UDC declined nationally after a turn-of-the-century peak. I contend that UDC members continued to wield power in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in the realm of culture and memory.

Mississippi played an important role in the woman suffrage movement in the nineteenth century. During the 1890 Mississippi Constitutional Convention delegates considered extending suffrage to white women to strengthen white hegemony, the idea being that white women voters would counteract any black votes without white men having to violate federal law.<sup>27</sup> Though the proposal failed to pass by just one vote, the suffragists learned an important lesson. National suffrage leaders believed that they could convince conservatives to allow suffrage if they presented it as reinforcement for white supremacy. At this point, many suffragists renounced their ties to black suffrage groups in order to achieve their goals. Most Mississippi suffragists in particular made it clear that they wanted suffrage on the same terms as their male counterparts, in other words, with specific exclusion of African Americans.<sup>28</sup>

Instead of continuing to move toward women's enfranchisement as a solution, Mississippi adopted literacy tests, poll taxes, and other means of disfranchising African American men. Attitudes toward women's suffrage, in fact, hardened by the time the Nineteenth Amendment was sent to states for ratification. In 1914, for instance, at a public hearing on women's suffrage, Mississippi legislators "insisted that woman suffrage was not in the best interests of Mississippi women." Many legislators agreed with the sentiment Joe Owen of Union, Mississippi expressed when he said, "I am absolutely, inherently, fundamentally, first,

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<sup>27</sup> This idea was particularly appealing in Mississippi because of the large population of African Americans.

<sup>28</sup> Spruill, Marjorie Julian and Jesse Spruill Wheeler. "Mississippi Women and the Woman Suffrage Amendment," *Mississippi History Now*, March 2002.

last, and all the time opposed to woman suffrage.”<sup>29</sup> If possible, opinions of woman suffrage fell even further by 1919, in large part due to the nature of conservatism in the South. Southern states stridently supported states’ rights once Southern whites redeemed the South after Reconstruction. These states also believed that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were unfair because Southern states were forced to ratify them to be permitted to rejoin the Union. Southerners also worried that the federal government might do more to enforce those amendments if women were granted the right to vote. Despite endorsements by President Woodrow Wilson and Mississippi Governor Theodore Bilbo, legislators viewed the federal amendment as “unwarranted, unnecessary, and dangerous interference.”<sup>30</sup> One legislator, R.H. Watts of Rankin County, went so far as to claim “he would rather die and go to hell” than vote for ratification.<sup>31</sup> In a final snub to woman suffrage, Mississippi refused to allow women to vote in the 1920 election, one of only two states to do so.<sup>32</sup> This was the atmosphere in which Mississippi’s women’s civic groups found themselves in the interwar period. To ensure that they could vote without incident, these organizations embarked on a campaign to illustrate the abilities and contributions of white women. As part of this movement, the UDC constructed a

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See “Mississippi Women and the Woman Suffrage Amendment” in *Mississippi History Now* by Marjorie Julian Spruill and Jesse Spruill Wheeler, A. Elizabeth Taylor, “The Woman Suffrage Movement in Mississippi, 1890-1920,” and Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States*.

memory tradition that supported that goal. They combined their memory tradition with articles about civic responsibility and education endeavors to encourage women voters and allay the fears of men. Respect for the Confederacy and the long-established tradition of women's memorial groups aided the UDC in their efforts.

The Mississippi Division of the UDC was established on April 27, 1897, in Meridian, Mississippi. This coincided with the founding of the Mississippi Woman Suffrage Association by Howorth and her fellow female statesman, Belle Kearney. Though never officially allied, the two organizations shared more than time and location. Both groups of women saw the vote as an important right that should be extended to women. Not only that but both organizations actively worked in their communities to protect women's voting rights in the interwar period. The UDC and the MWSA occasionally failed to see eye-to-eye on many issues related to women's rights but their coexistence indicates two important points about women's groups in Mississippi.<sup>33</sup> First, the pool of available and willing members was small and the membership of groups frequently overlapped. Second, women's civic groups in Mississippi had a long history in local communities where they conducted a variety of fundraising and betterment projects with many of the same beneficiaries.

Founded in 1894, the national body of the United Daughters of the Confederacy grew out of local and state efforts to memorialize, both in record and monument, the men and women who fought for or aided the Confederate States of America during the Civil War. Ladies' Memorial Associations (LMAs), precursors to the UDC, sprang up piecemeal across the South, almost as

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<sup>33</sup> Somerville Interview, Delta State, 1978.

soon as fighting ended in a particular area. In spring 1894, UDC cofounders Caroline Meriwether Goodlett and Anna Davenport Raines began corresponding about the possibility of forming a national federation of Confederate women's organizations. Goodlett and Raines, both members of existing LMAs, saw several advantages to a national organization, particularly the increased resources for the care and memorialization of Confederate veterans and increased clout to ensure the proper memory of the Civil War.<sup>34</sup>

From the outset, the national body of the UDC had strict membership requirements, evidenced by the group's refusal after the initial meeting to allow Mrs. J.C. Meyers of Texas to serve as a vice president upon finding out that she had married a "Union man."<sup>35</sup> Raines supported clearly defined, restrictive membership guidelines while Goodlett feared the potential repercussions of limiting participation and debate ensued. Eventually, the UDC determined that membership would be open to women "who are blood descendants, lineal or collateral, of men and women who served honorably in the Army, Navy, or Civil Service of the Confederate States of America, or gave Material Aid to the Cause."<sup>36</sup> Like most women's groups of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the UDC primarily attracted middle and upper class

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<sup>34</sup> Karen Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, Chapter 1. Cox examines the UDC in the period directly before the interwar period. *Dixie's Daughters* provides context for the actions of the UDC of the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Articles of Incorporation of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in Hattiesburg UDC Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi.

women.<sup>37</sup> For reasons of evidence of service and time to spend on organization activities, the UDC consisted, almost exclusively, of middle and upper class white women. Women who could afford to attend and host weekly or monthly meetings and had leisure time in general tended to belong to a higher class because of the expense involved. Additionally, applicants to the UDC had to prove relation to a Confederate veteran or supporter which required birth, marriage or death certificates and army records which wealthier people were more likely to possess. UDC chapters also voted on whether qualifying women could be admitted to further regulate their membership. In 1898, Mississippi met the requirements to establish a state division of the UDC, and the Mississippi Division offered little in the way of deviation from the national norms. Most members were “society ladies,” married or related to prominent men in their communities and involved in a variety of other community organizations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Mississippi Federation of Women’s Clubs, and the Red Cross.<sup>38</sup>

The UDC’s efforts focused on memory early on in the organization’s existence and they held true to this focus, even as veterans and “true daughters of the Confederacy” passed on. At the initial meeting between Goodlett and Raines in 1894, the Daughters determined five objectives: Historical, Educational, Benevolent, Memorial, and Patriotic.<sup>39</sup> The national body,

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<sup>37</sup> Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*. Blair also looks at clubwomen in a much earlier period of American history. She does a good job, though, of exploring their early activist undertakings and detailing their membership.

<sup>38</sup>“Miss Amanda Galbraith Howell: The Outstanding Person of Shreveport,” *The Southern Magazine*, March 1935, 36.

<sup>39</sup> Historical Yearbook, 1934-35 in the Hattiesburg UDC Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi.



state divisions, and each chapter organized their leadership according to these objectives; a member in each chapter or division served as vice president in charge of one of the objectives. Three of these in particular speak to the insistence on protecting and propagating the “true” memory of the Civil War and its participants. Under the categories of historical, educational, and memorial, members of the UDC classified several goals. First, they attempted to gather materials related to the Civil War and its participants. Second, they sought to ensure the “true” history of “the War Between the States.” Third, they pursued actions to honor the memory of Confederate veterans. Finally, the UDC paid special attention to the women they considered their foremothers, the women who lived through the Civil War and stayed loyal to the Confederate cause. In their efforts historical, educational, and memorial, the UDC constructed and spread their collective memory of the Civil War and its participants.

The Mississippi chapter of the UDC read and shared history books as one method of accomplishing their memorial goals. Matthew Page Andrews’ book *The Women of the South in War Times* served as an important part of the UDC’s interwar memorial arsenal. Beginning in 1920 and for the next two decades, Mississippi chapters of the UDC began sending copies of Andrews’ book to local high schools. Individual members, usually the chapter historian, also arranged to speak about the book to student assemblies.<sup>40</sup> The spread of *The Women of the South in War Times* marked one of the first efforts of the UDC in the interwar period to highlight the

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<sup>40</sup> January 10, 1929 Minutes of N.B. Forrest Chapter. See also March 1930 and April 1931 minutes in the Hattiesburg UDC Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi.

legacy left by Confederate, i.e. Southern and white, women. In disbursing this book, members of the UDC in Mississippi fulfilled a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, they followed their directive to honor the memory of Confederate women. Taken with the other civic actions and writings of UDC members, *The Women of the South in War Times* also served to indicate the deservedness and virtue of the women of the Confederacy whose lineage they claimed. As Andrews' examples indicate, the Confederate women played a pivotal role in sustaining Mississippi during the Civil War.

Of Southern women of the Civil War, Andrews said, "The simple narrative of their life and work unfolds a record of achievement, endurance, and self-sacrificing devotion that should be revealed and recognized as a splendid inspiration to men and women everywhere."<sup>41</sup> In *The Women of the South in War Times*, Andrews sought to correct misunderstandings of the "sectional conflict" and thus to restore the honor of Southern women. Like other Lost Cause literature, Andrews' work attempted to center the conflict around economic motivations, particularly the protective tariff. Of particular significance in this section, Andrews argued that the lack of slave insurrection during the War disproved irresponsible accusations of mistreatment under slavery. That slaves did not orchestrate an uprising during the Civil War, according to Andrews, also served as "an everlasting tribute to the splendid character of the dominant race

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<sup>41</sup> Matthew Page Andrews, *The Women of the South in War Times* (Baltimore: The Norman, Remington Company, 1920), 3.

and their moral uplift of a weaker one.”<sup>42</sup> This particular note served to support the ideas some Southerners had about the usefulness of woman suffrage to the continued disfranchisement of African Americans. White southern women, then, in the UDC memory tradition combined what they considered a characteristic self-sacrificing nature with a uniquely moral prerogative and were generally considered responsible for community betterment in the antebellum period and Civil War.

In chapter two, entitled “Genius of Southern Women,” Andrews described the ways Southern women met the challenges of war despite the fact “that nowhere then was woman’s ‘sphere’ widened beyond the domestic sphere.” Andrews contended that “they were even more ingenious than the men” and went on to offer a sketch of Maryland Confederate Elizabeth Waring Duckett as evidence.<sup>43</sup> The Warings possessed strong Southern sympathies, and Duckett’s brothers, with the assistance of their father, crossed into the Confederacy and joined the Confederate army. Although the military careers of the Waring brothers were less than illustrious according to Andrews’ account, the family attracted the attention of federal officials and, upon the younger brother’s return, both father and brother were arrested and imprisoned. Duckett immediately began a campaign to free her relatives. Her initiative brought her into contact with Cabinet officials, President Lincoln, and staff officers of the Union army.<sup>44</sup> In a lengthy account in her own words, Duckett recounts her various interactions with extraordinarily

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 34-36.

important political leaders on both sides of the conflict. Duckett, despite being outside her “sphere,” made direct appeals to these men and navigated the complex political situation in pursuit of familial and regional goals. The UDC held Duckett up as evidence of the abilities of women. As the UDC interpreted her story, Duckett proved that women could navigate public politics and produce positive results.

The efforts of Mrs. Ella K. Trader also warranted a sketch in *The Women of the South in War Times*. Trader, called “the Florence Nightingale of the South,” was a Mississippian by birth and devoted her time and considerable fortune “to the relief of suffering humanity.” Trader’s first husband, Dr. Frank Newsome, died prior to the outbreak of war, leaving her in charge of significant property interests and relatively independent. Trader began her work in Memphis, Tennessee but “having unusual executive ability,” she moved on to organize hospitals in Bowling Green, Kentucky, Nashville and Chatanooga, Tennessee, Corinth, Mississippi, and Marietta and Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>45</sup> Trader went beyond supplying or fundraising for hospitals, as might have been considered more within the purview of a woman of her status at the time. According to Andrews, Trader often worked twenty-hour days to secure everything for Confederate hospitals from buildings and blankets to medicines and food. While Trader was in Nashville, Confederates were forced to evacuate the city and the task of moving the wounded fell to Trader. After several days of travel across difficult and war-torn terrain, the engineer detached the locomotive from the train a few miles short of their destination, Winchester,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 132.

Tennessee. In Andrews' account, Trader "herself searched through the railroad yards until she had secured another engine, with which she brought her train to Winchester."<sup>46</sup> Nor was Trader exceptional among her siblings. After their father was shot by Union stragglers in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Trader's sister Josie King pursued the murderers for thirty miles, reported them to General Steele, and saw them arrested and saw them punished.<sup>47</sup> The UDC believed that the King-Trader sisters, like Elizabeth Waring Duckett, deftly performed when called upon and proved beneficial to their families and communities in the public sphere. They incorporated their story into their memory tradition because it supported their aims. The UDC of the interwar period believed they inherited the results of the efforts of their predecessors' ability to participate in a public, political sphere. UDC members saw women's suffrage as the manifestation of that inheritance.

Andrews presented a third and perhaps most incredible example in his description of Captain Sally Tompkins, C.S.A. Tompkins volunteered in Richmond Virginia when the Confederate Government had to call on private citizens after their hospital was found lacking after the first battle of Manassas. Tompkins established a hospital in Judge John Robertson's house. As time passed, other private hospitals came under the supervision of the Confederate Government but Tompkins retained control of her hospital, an action considered highly irregular. The Confederate Government attempted to take over operations at Tompkins' hospital but she refused to capitulate to their demands on the grounds that she had procured and operated the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 144.

hospital of her own initiative and at her own expense. The soldiers and their families whom Tompkins had, according to Andrews, so ably and selflessly served fully supported her in this endeavor. Interestingly, Andrews characterized this episode as Tompkins' "struggle for local independence [...] what may be termed a feminine phase of State Rights!"<sup>48</sup> In order to bring all hospitals, including Tompkins', under the auspices of the Confederate Government, officials granted her a special commission in the Confederate army with the rank of Captain. As a Captain, Tompkins possessed the "authority not only to go ahead with her work but to commandeer the services of others, together with what official medicines and supplies the Confederate Government could afford as her legal and proper apportionment."<sup>49</sup> In addition to forcing herself into the structure of the Confederate Government, Tompkins also represented the best of self-sacrificing Southern women to the UDC members of the 1920s and 1930s. She ran her hospital in Richmond throughout the war, largely at her own expense. She spent most of her money on this project during the Civil War and because of her actions on behalf of Confederate soldiers, Tompkins died destitute at a home for Confederate women.

Andrews concluded *The Women of the South in War Times* with an examination of the actions of the "women of '61" and their descendants during World War I, which concluded just prior to the book's publication. Andrews contended that Southern women only continued their war work, which primarily consisted of relief efforts, after the conclusion of the Civil War and

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 129.

that the women of '61 passed on their sense of civic responsibility. Andrews pointed to the women of the UDC as the inheritors of the tradition of relief work. During World War I, the national body of the UDC established a War Relief Committee, and the organization made monetary donations to American hospitals at home and abroad and invested the memorial funds in Liberty bonds. Chapters located near areas populated by troops performed relief work and provided entertainment for those soldiers.<sup>50</sup> Andrews traced a direct line from the honorable and exceptional women of the Civil War to the members of the UDC in the interwar period, a connection the Mississippi UDC highlighted when sending copies of *The Women of the South in War Times* to schools across the state.

In 1920 in *Our Heritage*, the official organ of the Mississippi Division of the UDC, Mrs. Augusta Evans Inge of Corinth, Mississippi published a piece on the reception of *The Women of the South in War Times*. She highlighted the personal connection that Mississippians felt to the book because it held “the picture of our sweet-faced honorary president, Mrs. Sarah Dabney Eggleston.”<sup>51</sup> She also applauded the truthfulness of the accounts, saying, “It is a history of much research, splendidly written, and every assertion or incident attached to it is vouched for by witnesses, many present with us today.”<sup>52</sup> *The Women of the South in War Times* caused quite a stir in Mississippi in 1920 as in that same issue of *Our Heritage* Margaret B. Jones of

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 453-456.

<sup>51</sup> Augusta Evans Inge, “*The Women of the South in War Times*,” *Our Heritage*, Dec. 1920, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Margaret B. Jones, “Review,” *Our Heritage*, Dec. 1920, 9.

Hattiesburg, Mississippi authored her own review of the book in the “Historian’s Page” section of the magazine. After gushing over the merits of the book, Jones implores the Daughters, “Every Daughter should possess her own copy. Let this be the slogan of the Mississippi Division. Order without delay.”<sup>53</sup> After describing the ordering process and once again urging her fellow UDC members to order as many copies as they could, Jones concludes by commenting on the historical importance of *The Women of the South in War Times*. She proclaims, “As an illumination of what life in the Confederacy meant to the women who no less than the men bore there share in the conflict, the book stands unique.”<sup>54</sup> After encouraging UDC members to purchase *The Women of the South in War Times* for themselves, local chapters turned to schools in their districts. The Nathan Bedford Forest Chapter, also known as the Madge Hoskins Holmes Chapter, of Hattiesburg, Mississippi was particularly devoted to spreading Andrews’ work to Mississippi’s school children. As early as 1928, members of this chapter purchased two copies of the book for the City High School. Rather than simply donating the books to the school libraries, UDC members gave presentations about the importance of *The Women of the South in War Times* in school assemblies. From the group’s records of the interwar period, the frequency of their donations to schools stands out. In the years when records were kept, the Nathan Bedford Forrest Chapter donated at least two copies of *The Women of the South in War Times*. At no point did they note donations of any other scholarly works or any other

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<sup>53</sup> Jones, 8.

<sup>54</sup> Jones, 9.



presentations to the schools.<sup>55</sup> Andrews' book had a lasting impact on the women of Mississippi's UDC.

According to the Mississippi chapter of the UDC, a significant part of securing the vote for women involved convincing men of the deservedness of women. Even after the nation ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, women who wanted to vote worried about ensuring their continued political legitimacy.<sup>56</sup> *The Women of the South in War Times* served to demonstrate this political legitimacy and abilities of Southern women. By building this tradition of respected women navigating the political sphere and tracing their organization back to those women, Mississippi's UDC used memory, the memory of the women of '61, to fit women's rights and citizenship into Mississippi's existing political culture. By illustrating that the Confederate women that the UDC honored, memorialized, and emulated had previously crafted their own space in the South's political culture, the women of the UDC, who generally embraced women's voting rights, smoothed their transition into the electoral sphere.

Members of Mississippi's UDC demonstrated their commitment to women's electoral rights through their publications in magazines and newspapers, their programs from their monthly meetings, and the materials they distributed to members and other Mississippians. In the

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<sup>55</sup> Papers of Madge Burney. These papers are mostly scraps collected by a former president of the N.B. Forrest Chapter. Included in the collection are incomplete meeting minutes and bits of speeches written on the back of receipts and hotel notepads. Although a complete overview of the chapter activities was difficult to glean from this source, the frequency of the mentions of *The Women of the South in War Times* indicate the book's significance to the members.

<sup>56</sup> See Ellen Carol DuBois, *Women's Suffrage and Women's Rights*, Marjorie Spruill Wheeler's *New Women of the New South*, and Barbara Ryan's *Feminism and the Women's Movement*.

forty-sixth anniversary edition of *Our Heritage*, the editors reprinted a May 1939 article from the *Times-Picayune*. In the article, entitled “Lazy Citizenship,” the author describes the menace uninformed and unthinking citizenship practices. According to the author, lazy citizenship or bad citizenship “opens the way to the concentration of power in the hands of the few, and whenever that concentration comes ‘the power eventually had been used for the exploitation of the many.’” The author goes on to advocate for the Manitowac method. First enacted in Manitowac, Wisconsin, the method was basically a civics class for the town’s young men and women intended to prepare them for the responsibilities of citizenship. The author expresses an idea endorsed by the UDC by their inclusion of the article. As the article argues, “Whatever is done to stimulate popular interest in citizenship duties and obligations deserves notice, commendation and imitation.”<sup>57</sup> The Mississippi Division of the UDC, by republishing this article in the souvenir edition of *Our Heritage* and presumably in an earlier edition of the magazine, clearly demonstrate their support for what they considered responsible, educated citizenship for both men and women.

The article in *Our Heritage* and others like it demonstrates the racism and classism that colored the politics of white Mississippi. The words responsible and educated, like literacy tests and poll taxes, were exclusive states that could primarily be achieved by white middle and upper class Mississippians. In other articles, a more controversial expression of the value of the vote emerged and strengthened the connection between coded language and disfranchise measures. In

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<sup>57</sup> “Lazy Citizenship,” *Our Heritage—Souvenir Edition*, May 1939, 24.

a 1938 newspaper article contained in the scrapbook of the General Charles Clark Chapter 44, the author addresses the question of the poll tax, saying, “No person, man or woman who does not attach enough value to his or her citizenship to be willing to pay two dollars per year for the privilege of voting should not be considered a good citizen.”<sup>58</sup> These examples illustrate that although the UDC supported expanded voting rights, many members believed that only people who appreciated their rights according to the standards of the UDC and white Mississippians should be allowed to exercise them. These beliefs make the UDC’s use of memory even more significant because the collective memory comprised of those stories of the honor and commendable actions of the Confederate women conferred some of that right and responsibility on their descendants.

The monthly meetings held in each chapter followed a particular form and historical program that specified themes and topics of discussion. Because of the historical yearbooks published each year, these programs represent a great portion of the UDC materials.<sup>59</sup> Often, only the yearbooks are present in collections of UDC materials. Therefore, these conclusions are based on the topics members discussed and what meeting minutes are available, as well as letters from UDC leaders. According to the yearbooks, certain “holidays” were observed annually. For

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<sup>58</sup> General Charles Clark Chapter 44 Scrapbook. This article was clipped from the newspaper so the author and paper are unidentified. It was pasted to a page entitled 1938 with other materials from that year. As it is not entirely clear, 1938 is the assumed date of publication for this particular article.

<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately, because the minutes of the meetings are frequently missing from the archives or incomplete or truncated, the actual discussions are nearly impossible to get at. I based my conclusions on the proffered topics, the trajectory of the UDC’s political writings, and the group’s sustained political engagement.

instance, on September 10, UDC members celebrated Founder's Day, in honor of Caroline Goodlett, "a perfect woman, nobly planned, to warn, to comfort, and command."<sup>60</sup> In March of most years, the UDC celebrated what appears to be a women's history month with topics ranging from "Girls of the 1870s" to the "Women of the Confederacy" to "Women for Jury Selection?" among other suggested activities such as asking parents and grandparents to recount their experiences from the Civil War and Reconstruction.<sup>61</sup> In December 1938, UDC chapters across Mississippi considered the "Influence of Women in Politics." At the very least, these historical programs suggest that members discussed topics pertaining to women's rights, although when considered with other evidence, it seems more likely that UDC members debated these topics to determine how far to extend women's political rights rather than their continuation in total. Some of these topics spoke directly to the political atmosphere in Mississippi at the time while others fit more in the memory construction process. That these two focuses of the UDC were frequently discussed together lent strength to the use of memory to carve out a space for white women in Mississippi's political culture. Memory and contemporary politics were inextricably intertwined in the UDC in the interwar period, especially because of the new political independence of its members.

A third way that the UDC illustrated the importance of women's political rights relied on the works of other authors whose work the UDC distributed throughout Mississippi. One such work was the aforementioned book, *The Women of the South in War Times*. Other materials

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<sup>60</sup> Historical Yearbook, 1933-34.

<sup>61</sup> Historical Yearbook, 1937-38. Historical Yearbook, 1933-34. Historical Yearbook, 1938-39.

included the national UDC magazine *The Southern Magazine* and speeches delivered by presidents and historians. These articles and speeches indicate that the Mississippi Division of the UDC was part of a larger memory-making group. Three articles from *The Southern Magazine* stand out for their focus on the contributions of women to societies undergoing strife. In the September 1935 edition, Fletcher M. Green, Professor of American History in Emory University offered “Women of the Confederacy in War Times,” an article unrelated to Andrews’ earlier book. In this article, delivered previously to the Agnes Lee Chapter of the UDC in Decatur, Georgia, Green outlined the variety of contributions Southern women made during the Civil War. Where Andrews touched primarily on relief work, that is but one of the many facets of war work Green identified. Green also placed the Civil War within a larger narrative of women’s participation in wars. According to Green, “There was scarcely a woman who did not contribute to the cause in time, labor, money, suffering and hardship in hospitals, in offices, on the battlefield, in stores and in munition plants, or on the farms and plantations.”<sup>62</sup> Green stressed the unity of the Southern women as a characteristic that sets them apart in history. Green suggested that “the heroines of this war came from every class of society, and represented every grade in the social scale and every walk of life.” Green also pointed out that the sacrifices of those with less to lose were no less significant than those of women who had fortunes to spare. Green, then, offered a much more egalitarian view than the membership of the UDC would

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<sup>62</sup> Fletcher M. Green, *The Southern Magazine*, September 1935, 17.

suggest. Southern women “were fair representatives of the spirit of their whole sex.”<sup>63</sup> In attempting to explain how the extraordinary activities of the women of the South in the Civil War came about, Green looked to the traditional explanation that they were more invested in the principles and issues involved. Green also made the novel observation that these actions may be attributed “to the movement for the general emancipation of women from tradition and the bondage of social custom, which took place during the nineteenth century.”<sup>64</sup> With this single statement, Green placed the UDC and the Confederate women in a longer tradition of women’s rights advocacy.

Mary H. Flourney, the only amateur among the authors, recounted the stories of Virginia’s wartime women. Flourney focused on the resourcefulness and coolness under fire of Confederate women in her 1935 article. In this collection of very short stories, bravery and cunning stand out as themes in the behavior of Virginian women. Here again, women acted successfully outside the domestic sphere. Flourney told the stories of Belle Boyd, the famous woman spy of Virginia, and women like Lucy Ann Cox and Mrs. Roger A. Pryor who traveled from place to place during the War, one to follow her husband and the other to flee Unionists. The Confederate women of Virginia participated in relief efforts, petitioned generals and politicians, and played active roles in the conflict. Flourney concluded that “well it was for the Confederacy that behind her wall of superb fighting men stood a wall of dauntless women, whose faith never faltered” and whose participation sustained the Confederacy throughout the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 17.

War.<sup>65</sup> Flourney's article reiterated the ways in which the UDC believed Confederate women proved themselves capable during the Civil War.

Mattie Lloyd Wooten, Dean of Women and Assistant Professor in Department of Sociology, Texas State College for Women, delivered a radio address in April 1935 the text of which was reproduced in the May 1935 edition of *The Southern Magazine*. This address, entitled "Pioneer Women of Texas," shifted the focus from the Civil War to activities Texas women undertook as "pioneers" out west. Although the War was still significant to the women of Texas, Wooten established the tradition of socially and politically active women long before the Civil War necessitated the action of other Confederate women.<sup>66</sup> The pioneer women of Texas acted as "wives, mothers, religious leaders, educators, industrial workers, agriculturalists, business women, writers, and artists in a manner that helped to develop the frontier."<sup>67</sup> According to Wooten, "the outlet for her ingenuity and originality was unhampered by sex discrimination."<sup>68</sup>

The articles in Mississippi's newspapers about the UDC focused on the social aspect of the group rather than their civic engagement despite the decidedly political nature of some of their writings and activities. Most of the articles can be found in the Social section of the papers

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<sup>65</sup> Mary Flourney, "Virginia Women During the War," *The Southern Magazine*, August 1935, 20 & 51-52.

<sup>66</sup> Mattie Lloyd Wooten, "Pioneer Women of Texas," *The Southern Magazine*, May 1935, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>68</sup> Although this particular work focuses exclusively on Texas and does not attempt to place the larger Confederate women story within its context, subsequent editions of *The Southern Magazine* featured articles apparently inspired by this one, including one entitled "Pioneer Women of Mississippi."

and describe the food and tableware in more detail than the topics of discussions.<sup>69</sup> For instance, in the March 11, 1928 edition of *The Morning Call* out of Laurel, Mississippi, the Society section described the “delightful social hour” and good refreshments that were served at the local Children of the Confederacy meeting but failed to mention the topics discussed or business conducted.<sup>70</sup> In *The Leader Call*, also out of Laurel, editors had to print a correction in 1938 because a reporter had referred to the sectional conflict as the Civil War instead of the War Between the States. This correction clearly indicated that the UDC wielded some power in Laurel and yet this was the most overt political action on which either paper reported. *The Delta Democrat* and the *Delta Star*, published in Greenville, mentioned the UDC less frequently than the Laurel papers, only writing stories on unusual or significant acts such as state meetings or scholarship awards.<sup>71</sup> The absence of the UDC’s political actions in Mississippi’s newspapers indicates either a lack of novelty of these activities or an outright acceptance of the participation of some women in the political sphere.

By crafting a collective memory that encouraged respect and emulation of women who engaged in civic responsibilities, the UDC ensured that their own political activities were

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<sup>69</sup> For this paper, I have examined newspapers from Laurel and Greenville because they are the only papers in Mississippi that are digitized. A more academic reason for selecting these towns is that located in two different regions of the state, these papers represent unique communities that differ in make-up, economy, and social relationships.

<sup>70</sup> *The Morning Call*, March 11, 1928, 4.

<sup>71</sup> The Greenville papers are generally considered two of the more liberal papers in Mississippi. This might account for the difference in reporting. Greenville also had a strong chapter of the UDC so inactivity is an unlikely culprit. I think this difference most likely can be attributed to a mere difference in layout, with the Greenville papers devoting less space to typical Society pages articles.



accepted within Mississippi's political culture. Members of the Mississippi Division of the UDC wrote articles, spread materials, and inspired discussion that encouraged the acceptance of women in Mississippi's electoral politics by positioning the UDC within a longer tradition of civic engagement by women. The absence of stories in Mississippi newspapers about protests against voting by UDC members after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment signifies the success of the UDC memory-constructing campaign.

Mississippi politicians vociferously opposed woman suffrage after a brief but intense flirtation with the idea in 1890. Their initial contemplation of the concept was prompted by a desire to cement white supremacy and neutralize African American voters. After determining other methods to achieve those goals, Mississippi's legislators fully turned on woman suffrage. The UDC and other women's civics groups fought in the interwar period to change this attitude and encourage voting among certain Mississippi women and acceptance among the white male political establishment in the state. In part because of the power of memory and in part because they were already established as a memorial organization, the UDC constructed a memorial tradition that supported their aims. They spread this memory tradition across the state through magazine articles, school presentations, and other publicity measures. They continued these activities throughout the interwar period in order to continually reinforce their views of woman suffrage. In spite of their intense opposition to woman suffrage, Mississippi politicians eventually allowed women to vote and Mississippi newspapers reported no overt attempts at intimidation of white women at the polls. These victories, coupled with the election of two

women legislators in the 1920s, marked the success of the memory tradition invoked by the UDC in the interwar period.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE MISSISSIPPI FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S CLUBS

The state of women's rights activism after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment is an oft-debated topic among historians. Many scholars classify the interwar period as a nadir of sorts, an era in which the movement fractured due to special interests and an inability to build coalitions.<sup>72</sup> Recently however, new scholarship has emerged reclaiming the period for women's rights.<sup>73</sup> While some of those works include the South, Mississippi, perhaps due to its history of restrictive voting requirements, is often overlooked in post-suffrage women's rights histories. This study seeks to explore the actions undertaken by women's civic groups in Mississippi that smoothed the way for their participation in electoral politics. The Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs was one such group in the interwar period whose members embraced their new responsibilities as citizens. Memory was an important tool in the arsenal of women's rights activists and had been throughout the suffrage movement, and these women constructed and

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<sup>72</sup> See *Weight of Their Votes*, p. 240, footnote 5. According to Schuyler, Anne Firor Scott's *The Southern Lady* and William Chafe's *American Woman* provide good examples of this line of argument while Theda Skocpol's *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* argues that women were more powerful prior to their enfranchisement.

<sup>73</sup> Lorraine Gates Schuyler in *The Weight of their Votes* and Anastasia Sims in *The Power of Femininity in the New South* are two important works in this vein. Both authors identify alternative ways that women made arguments and used their political leverage after suffrage passed.

disbursed a memory tradition throughout the state of Mississippi after the 1919 decision.<sup>74</sup> In several instances this memory tradition highlighted the contributions of women of the past to underscore the deservedness of women, but other times the MFWC held up male figures as esteemed citizens whom women should emulate in their own civic lives. Although other women's groups, most notably the United Daughters of the Confederacy, fully incorporated men into their memory traditions, they did not do so in conjunction with their discussions of the rights and responsibilities of women citizens. The MFWC certainly pointed to the distinct characteristics and concerns that women brought to electoral politics, but, especially when compared to other women's groups in Mississippi, they seemed particularly interested in citizenship, and not just women's citizenship, when crafting their memory tradition. The MFWC appeals to memory, when combined with civic education efforts and other writings about women's rights, helped carve out a place for white women in Mississippi's political arena.

The MFWC, an organization of women's clubs, formed in May 1898 and joined the national organization, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, in 1904. Notable members of

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<sup>74</sup> Women in the suffrage movement wrote articles and performed historical plays to present their arguments to a larger audience. See David Glassberg, "History and the Public: Legacies of the Progressive Era," (*Journal of American History* 73.4, Mar., 1987), 959. For more information on the historical consciousness and memory see Susan Porter Benson, *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* and "Memory and American History: A Special Edition" in *Journal of American History* 75. Pageantry was only one kind of public history practiced in the early twentieth century. As such, many of the works available on collective historical consciousness focus on commemoration and monumentation. See *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* by John Bodnar and *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* by John R. Gillis for more information about the control of public memory and the subsequent construction of the collective identity.

the GFWC included Jane Addams, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Mississippian Ellen S. Woodward, administrator of the Works Progress Administration, appointed in 1935. Local clubs from around the state could apply to join the MFWC and they did so for a variety of reasons. In a June 1929 article entitled “Federation Ideals,” Mrs. E.H. Walker of the Leaksville Music Club described the motivations of women who joined the clubs and clubs that joined the Federation. “We join a club,” Walker said, “because a club can accomplish for a community what an individual never can, and through federation we multiply by fifty what one club can do.” Walker noted that the national organization did not really “do things.” Instead, the local organizations undertook most of the work but depended on the numerical strength of the GFWC backing up their actions. According to Walker, the women present at the first convention of the GFWC focused on one question, “How can the organized women of America better serve their country? Now standing 3,000,000 strong what can we do, as a unit?”<sup>75</sup>

After the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment the Federation saw electoral participation as another avenue by which women could serve their country. The MFWC embraced education efforts and registration drives to ready Mississippi women for the responsibilities of full citizenship. They combined these efforts with a memory tradition that highlighted the deservedness of women and appealed to their new status as equal citizens. With this combination, the MFWC helped create a place for women in Mississippi’s political culture.

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<sup>75</sup> Mrs. E.H. Walker, “Federation Ideals,” *Mississippi Woman’s Magazine*, June 1929, 26.

The memory tradition utilized by the MFWC comprised a significant part of their post-suffrage civic activities. The MFWC saw readying Mississippi's newly eligible women voters as one of the organization's biggest responsibilities. This included preparing men and women opposed to women's suffrage for their participation. By crafting and sharing a memory tradition that highlighted the deservedness of women and that included them in the category citizens, the MFWC created a place for women in Mississippi's electoral politics.

The MFWC was uniquely situated in terms of the groups Halbwachs describes. As a group comprised of other, diverse groups, the MFWC reached a wider audience than single-interest organizations. Additionally, when using their crafted memory to further their goal of seeing women at the polls, their organizational structure proved beneficial. The MFWC had a state president and officers but the local clubs operated fairly autonomously. The state organization published a magazine, *Mississippi Woman's Magazine*, through which state leaders could communicate their goals, not only to women who actively championed expanded women's rights but also to clubwomen who were less ardent in their support. State officials also wrote letters to local women's clubs that were read aloud at meetings. These letters offered encouragement to women for voting and voter's drives and built up the memory tradition. If, for instance, not all the members of the Leaksville Music Club or the Oxford Women's Book Club were suffragists, their club's membership in the MFWC ensured that they were exposed to arguments and memories in favor of increased citizenship rights for women. These women's clubs were also extremely active in their local communities, which increased the visibility of,

and audience for the MFWC's opinions on women's voting rights and responsibilities. The MFWC combined memory tradition and civic education and engagement to clear the way to the polls for women. Their community involvement allowed the memory tradition they created to spread to other groups of Mississippians resulting in a relatively smooth transition to expanded rights for women.

In the President's Letter in the September 1923 edition of the *Mississippi Club Woman*, Mrs. J.C. Hardy implored women to remember their treatment by politicians before the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. Hardy reminded women of the condescension they or their mothers endured prior to 1920. Politicians addressed their speeches "to the ladies, God bless 'em" and spoke primarily of women's role in raising up the next generation of male politicians. The voiceless women though were "as intelligently aware of the issues as any seasoned politician among them," according to Hardy. She noted that in 1923, at almost their earliest opportunity, "women organized the political rallies, charged for dinner for their charities, and sat up front listening for what candidates stood for now and asking cogent, applicable questions."<sup>76</sup> Hardy's purpose in writing this article appears three-fold. First, she commemorated the efforts of clubwomen who worked without the vote and highlighted their endurance. Second, Hardy demonstrated the abilities of Mississippi's women to participate fully in electoral politics. Finally, she impressed upon younger members the need to continue to press for increased

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<sup>76</sup> Mrs. J. C. Hardy, "The President's Letter," *Mississippi Club Woman*, September 1923, 3.

participation by women by appealing to the memory of earlier clubwomen and warning of the oppressions that could return should women fail.

Hardy did not rely on memory alone to prepare clubwomen for their electoral responsibilities. During her tenure as president of the MFWC, the Federation published several programs and articles related to women's suffrage. In March 1923, the magazine featured "Catechism of Citizenship: For use by the Girls' Junior Club of the State of Mississippi," compiled by Mrs. D.H. Foresman of Electric Mills, Mississippi. Citizenship training, according to Foresman, prepared a woman not only by educating her about her rights and responsibilities but also by making her "interested and eager to perform her part by casting her ballot for that which she believes is for the best interest of our people." The vote allowed women to more effectively achieve their community goals, in Foresman's opinion, so they should educate themselves to take full advantage of their rights.<sup>77</sup> Later that year, in a proposed program on citizenship, Mrs. Marc Kean of Ocean Springs, Mississippi, lambasted the clubwomen by saying "Many of our women fail in their duty as citizens." Kean saw her fellow Mississippi women as uninterested in the vote, but many still loudly complained about elected officials despite their inaction. Kean identified the use of the MFWC's history as an important method of "awakening these indifferent women to a sense of their duty and privilege." If only "to these women could be brought the knowledge of the work done by those who pioneered" for the right to vote, she lamented. She concluded her program by encouraging Mississippi's women to "take up the duty

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<sup>77</sup> Mrs. D.H. Foresman, "Catechism of Citizenship: For use by the Girls' Junior Club of the State of Mississippi," *Mississippi Woman's Magazine*, March 1923, 18.



that has been given you through heartaches and discouragement.”<sup>78</sup> In this short piece, Kean did two important things. She appealed to the memory of the hardworking clubwomen of years past and she clearly identified the clubwomen of the interwar period as direct inheritors of that spirit and work. She and her contemporaries were, as she saw it, both entitled to the gains made by the women of the past and duty-bound to participate to the fullest in political life.

The local clubs followed the suit of the state organization, blending memory and current affairs. The Women’s Book Club of Oxford, founded in 1895, was a group of women who sought “some organization of a literary character that would be an uplift and inspiration to [their] minds and a release from the mere drudgery or the trivial things of life.” In her brief history of the club, Mrs. S.A. Murray began by refuting claims she had encountered about the “inferiority of women’s intellect.” In part she used history, a history she linked to her club and any woman engaged in intellectual pursuits, to dispel those rumors. According to Murray, “the touch of woman’s hand is no less tender because she studies Shakespeare and proposes measures for the beautifying of her town.” Women, in Murray’s reading of history, produced works on par with their male counterparts when “allowed to take equal education with the ‘lords of creation.’” To evidence this claim, she argues, “the same conditions of society which a Homer and a Hesiod furnished an Aspasia and a Sappho,” women whose study afforded them great influence. Clubwomen who sought to educate themselves and improve their communities were inheritors of

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<sup>78</sup> Mrs. Marc Kean, “Citizenship,” *Mississippi Woman’s Magazine*, August 1923, 15-16.

this tradition of capability in Murray's opinion.<sup>79</sup> Keeping in mind that the members of the Women's Book Club of Oxford saw themselves as part of a long line of intellectual women, the wide variety of activities they undertook converged under the umbrella terms "education" and "improvement." While their discussion topics appear disconnected at first, the place in history they recognized as their own proved to be the thread that pulled their interests together. As a civic organization dedicated to the intellectual improvement of its members, a group of women with more public opportunity than their ancestors, and a part of a movement intent on improving their communities, the Women's Book Club of Oxford could on January 30 debate whether the English system of party government was more democratic than the American system and follow that up with a discussion of art in Oxford with no conflict.<sup>80</sup> The identity of the Women's Book Club of Oxford and the subsequent activities members participated in were dependent on how they placed themselves historically and on which memory traditions they attached themselves. By connecting their memory tradition with their civic goals, particularly expanded rights for women, the clubs in the MFWC lent historical weight to their arguments.

Attempts to establish a connection between women of consequence in the past and women who wanted expanded rights in the interwar period continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In the May 1936 edition of the *Southern Magazine*, Miss M. Colie Covington published an article entitled "The Pioneer Clubwomen of Mississippi." In this article Covington outlined

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<sup>79</sup> Mrs. S.A. Murray, *A Brief History of the Women's Book Club of Oxford*, 1. Unpublished manuscript in Women's Book Club of Oxford Collection at the University of Mississippi.

<sup>80</sup> Women's Book Club of Oxford, 1923-1924 Yearbook in the Women's Book Club of Oxford collection at the University of Mississippi.

the efforts of the early federated clubwomen of Mississippi from the initial organization of the group to the end of the 1920s. The article intended, in the words of Covington, “all honor to the Pioneer Club Women of Mississippi.”<sup>81</sup> These early clubwomen recognized the necessity of action before they had the right to vote. To effect change despite this legal obstacle, the MFWC pursued other tactics. The pioneer clubwomen established scholarships for girls, organized traveling libraries, and arranged presentations for local schools. They also attempted to improve sanitary conditions in their communities. The Women’s Book Club of Oxford, for instance, teamed up with the Browning Club to spearhead a rat removal campaign in the late 1920s.<sup>82</sup> Covington marked the culmination of these early activities with a description of the Federation’s legislative program that began in 1903. That year, without the benefit of the vote, MFWC members convinced the State Legislature to pass a “Child Welfare” bill. Covington concluded this section by praising the “splendid legislative program in the interest of women and children in the State” and acknowledging the example set by Nellie Nugent Somerville, clubwoman behind the legislative campaigns, co-founder of the Mississippi Woman Suffrage Association, and first female state senator in Mississippi.<sup>83</sup> In Covington’s opinion, these women were primarily responsible for the growth of the MFWC to an organization five thousand strong at time of publication. Based on the tone of the article, Covington believed these women were to be

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<sup>81</sup> M. Collie Covington, “The Pioneer Clubwomen of Mississippi,” *The Southern Magazine*, May 1936, 27.

<sup>82</sup> Oxford Women’s Book Club, Meeting Minutes, June 1928.

<sup>83</sup> Covington, 27.

held in high esteem and their actions emulated by other clubwomen. In particular, the inclusion of Nellie Nugent Somerville, a well-known advocate of women's voting rights and mother of Lucy Somerville Howorth an even-more involved female political figure, indicates the MFWC's continued commitment to expanding women's rights. More than five thousand Mississippians were exposed to Covington's memory tradition about the pioneer clubwomen of Mississippi through magazine subscriptions and club meetings. Clubwomen in turn, likely discussed articles like Covington's with their husbands, fathers, and brothers, further increasing the article's impact. Articles like Covington's that presented the long tradition of Mississippi's clubwomen, their involvement in civic life, and the resulting improvements they achieved presented Mississippi women as capable and worthy voters.

The author of the address delivered at the thirty-seventh annual convention of the MFWC in 1935 used a common memory to encourage greater civic engagement among its members. Whenever possible clubs sent representatives to the state convention and those women made reports to the other club members upon their return. Other times, as in this case, summaries of convention business were printed in *Mississippi Woman's Magazine*. In this particular address, the president of the MFWC wove together several themes. As this convention took place in Natchez, Mississippi, she argued that clubwomen should learn from the history and people of Natchez country.<sup>84</sup> Natchez, she claimed, "proudly preserved that which is enchanting, beautiful, and good." The community embraced change when "it was sure that it saw something

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<sup>84</sup> Natchez pioneered the historical pilgrimage a few years earlier. See Karen Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie* for discussion of the Natchez Pilgrimage.

better in the new.” By understanding the history of Natchez, the clubwomen of Mississippi could understand the necessary steps to expanding the MFWC’s effectiveness, according to the author. The president went on to remind her audience of the record of MFWC members of the past, from the founding in 1898 to the 1930s. The history of the MFWC should “serve as a beacon light to guide our erring feet and as a strong tonic for a more glorious future.” The theme of the rest of the address, from which the author drew the title, is “prove your own selves.” According to the author, if Mississippi’s clubwomen failed to continue on the path paved by their foremothers in the club movement and, like Natchez, embrace new positive weapons at their disposal (including civic engagement, voter education, and voting) “all out failures can be directly traced to our lethargy.”<sup>85</sup> In the mid-1930s, a period of intense social upheaval during which the focus on women’s voting rights could have fallen off, the state president of the MFWC used the past, the collective state past and the history unique to the organization, to encourage increased personal civic responsibility for women who wanted to effect change in their communities.

In some articles, the MFWC deviated from the standard memory tradition to which women’s groups appealed. In most cases, clubwomen made use of memories of other women to showcase the merit of their predecessors and persuasively connect themselves to those women. This strategy was fairly uniform in a variety of women’s clubs. Occasionally, as in the February 1932 edition of *Mississippi Woman’s Magazine*, the MFWC tied their goals to the memory of men. The article, “Education in Washington’s Time and Now,” by Virginia R. Price profiled

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<sup>85</sup> “President’s Page,” *Mississippi Woman’s Magazine*, August 1935, 2.

former president George Washington, paying particular attention to his opinions on education.

The story of Washington's attempts to receive an education in the colonies mirrored the concerns that Mississippi's clubwomen expressed about their own education system. Education, according to Price, "had long been defective or neglected in the Colonies." Price alleged that Washington, though, had two realizations that contributed to his success. First, he recognized the importance of "finished manners and the habits of the socially elite." Second, he realized that "he must obtain for himself the education needed." Price drew a parallel between Washington's example and the principles and goals of the MFWC and emphasized the importance of voting rights to those ideals. Mississippi of the interwar period featured the same lackluster education as colonial America according to Price. If Mississippi was to improve, the MFWC members had to tackle the education problem themselves just as Washington did in his life. While they could do so by creating a positive atmosphere in their own homes, Price pointed to informed voting as the way to ensure maximum impact on the state's education system.<sup>86</sup> In this article, Price incorporated a man into the MFWC's memory tradition. She pointed to Washington not only as a figure to emulate but also as an intellectual ancestor of sorts. The MFWC carried on his commitment to education and social improvement according to Price. While other women's civic groups used the memory of men to argue that women should vote because their male ancestors fought for some ideal, the MFCW clearly included men as well as women in a tradition that they believed granted women more credibility as political actors.

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<sup>86</sup> Virginia R. Price, "Education in Washington's Time and Now," *Mississippi Woman's Magazine*, February 1932, 8.

The backdrop against which white women in Mississippi made these political gains also saw some of the most repressive conditions for African Americans in the nation's post-Emancipation history. As race relates to this particular topic, historian Glenda Gilmore explained quite cogently that "white women move in and out of the spotlight as their politics intersect with and diverge from black women's strategies." Gilmore's book *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* explores gender and race in politics and centers African American women in her narrative.<sup>87</sup> The MFWC stayed true to Gilmore's assertions about white women activists. Over the two-decade interwar period, the *Mississippi Woman's Magazine* only featured two articles on African Americans, despite the MFWC's expressed interest in the condition of African Americans in Mississippi. The first, published in January 1925, entitled "Department of Race Relations," presented a well-meaning but misguided and blind understanding of the circumstances of African Americans in the state. This article falls into Gilmore's category of white archival sources that have obscured the actions of African Americans.<sup>88</sup> Miss Corinne Rogers of New Albany, Mississippi, author of "Department of Race Relations," noted many Mississippians "fail to realize the vastness of [the]

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<sup>87</sup> Gilmore, Glenda. *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. In *Gender and Jim Crow*, Gilmore looks at the relationship between white women and black women and discusses the impact that women's suffrage eventually had on race discrimination at the polls.

<sup>88</sup> One reason that Gilmore undertook her project was to look beyond those sources. As she says in her introduction, sources from white women activists tend to place white women in the center of their narratives and focus on their actions. This focus in turn obscures the actions African Americans pursued on their own behalf.

negro population.” These African American Mississippians, claimed Rogers, could make or break the state depending on their respectability and the status of their homes. Although she explicitly did not advocate “the spirit of race prejudice that seems to dominate the Californians,” her purpose in writing the article was to ensure that other Mississippians were wide-awake to the influence of African Americans on the potential greatness of their state.<sup>89</sup> The members of the MFWC bared responsibility for the well-being of the whole community, according to Rogers, and if African Americans due to their poor living circumstances were a “source of danger to the whole community,” then clubwomen, she charged, must do all they could to improve the station of Mississippi’s African American community.

The second article, not appearing until more than a decade later in April 1935, was actually a letter from Mrs. J.E. Johnson, President of the Mississippi Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, printed in response to inquiries from MFWC members. This demonstrated a marked change from attitudes in 1925 but still complies with Gilmore’s argument about clubwomen’s race relations. Johnson described the club’s founding in 1901 and relayed some information about their efforts and goals in 1935 in her letter. The letter and accompanying editor’s note reveal three interesting points about clubwomen in Mississippi. First, the editor’s note mentions that “many of the women of the Mississippi Federation of Women’s Clubs have been instrumental in organizing the club work among the colored women.” Johnson made no

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<sup>89</sup> Rogers was referring to California’s concerns about Japanese immigrants, the so-called “Yellow Peril” that Californians had decried from coast to coast. Mississippi apparently did not suffer from the same racist sentiment nor did they complain about it. Again, according to Rogers, most did not even realize how many African Americans lived in the state which speaks to the divisions present.



mention of MFWC members or white women at all when describing the organization of the MFCWC. Opinions about the autonomy of African American women clearly differed between the groups. Second, just like the MFWC, members of the MFCWC used memory to position themselves in political culture. Rather than focus on the pioneer clubwomen in Mississippi's African American community, Johnson emphasized the involvement of Margaret Murray Washington, wife of Booker T. Washington, in her account of the group's organization. The only other actors Johnson mentions by name are the MFCWC's many white friends who assisted in their legislative efforts and the president of the National Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. By drawing attention to the organization's connection to a highly respected and well-known woman, Johnson established a connection that lent the MFCWC Washington's credibility. Finally, Johnson's letter to the MFWC drew attention to the goals shared between the groups. Both the MFWC and the MFCWC sought to improve the state of Mississippi through education and civic engagement. Most importantly, these articles show that black and white clubwomen in Mississippi were aware of the work each group attempted and accomplished. This awareness and their interactions complicate the narrative somewhat.<sup>90</sup>

The Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs used memory in two distinct ways to support their belief in the benefits of women's suffrage. They crafted a memory tradition that stressed the abilities of women to navigate the world beyond the home. Additionally, they

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<sup>90</sup> I intend to explore this idea more fully in the next chapter. I examine more closely the interactions between black and white clubwomen and the ways both groups discussed their charitable work in order to uncover the nuanced relationship between the groups in Mississippi. This section falls in line with Gilmore's claims in *Gender and Jim Crown* about the shifting willingness to cooperate.

structured that memory tradition in such a way as to demonstrate their connections to the deserving women of the past. In doing so, the MFWC painted women's suffrage as more of a continuity rather than a revolution. Women, they argued, were already pursuing the same goals they would with electoral rights. They continued to build up this memory tradition throughout the interwar period in order to remind members and other Mississippians that women needed to vote for the good of the state. The MFWC authors strove to connect most topics to the theme of good citizenship to demonstrate the pervasive power of voting. Two types of article separate the MFWC from other women's civic groups in the interwar period. First, they occasionally incorporated men into their memory tradition and made the same heritage claims on these men as they did women. The MFWC also discussed African Americans and the Mississippi Federation of Colored Women's Clubs more directly than other women's civic groups. By using memory, the MFWC imagined a political space in which women could work, and according to their tradition, had operated for decades. By introducing gender and race in distinct ways, the members of the MFWC also demonstrated Mississippi's complicated political culture.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE MISSISSIPPI STATE FEDERATION OF COLORED WOMEN'S CLUBS

African Americans in Mississippi also had a rich tradition of club organizing and in 1903 they established the Mississippi State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. This organization joined the National Association of Colored Women and throughout the interwar period, Mississippi clubwomen fully participated in local, state, and national efforts. These pursuits featured some activities, like community health programs and youth education, in common with white clubwomen. Their positions as black women in a systematically racist society necessitated some of the other ventures undertaken by the Mississippi Federation. In trying to combat racism in addition to sexism, Mississippi's black clubwomen had to address the improvement of their race as well as the prejudices of others. Their task, then, was not only to protect women's right to vote but also to contest racial disfranchisement.

In the national and regional publications, black clubwomen took advantage of memory and memorialization less often than their white counterpoints. Although the NACW had a history committee similar to those of the UDC and the MFWC, only a handful of articles in *The National Notes* and *The Southeastern Herald* featured memories or history and those that did

often focused on the recently deceased or the recent past. Instead of looking back, the NACW and Mississippi's black clubwomen emphasized the present and the future.<sup>91</sup>

Those articles and activities that memorialized past events fall into three categories: physical monuments, individual memorial articles, and African American histories. The efforts for physical memorials in the '20s and '30s centered on the Douglass Home. The NACW launched a national campaign to preserve Frederick Douglass' Washington, D.C. home in 1923, and by 1926, the group had invested more than twenty thousand dollars in maintenance and conservation. The Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association, a separate, five-member group in no way connected to the NACW, oversaw the initial management of the home. After the NACW paid the mortgage on the home, the two organizations reached an agreement whereby the acting board of the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association resigned to be replaced with members of the NACW. Per the agreement, the new NACW-populated board could not abolish the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association as a separate entity, but by exclusively appointing NACW members to the board, they ensured continued control by black clubwomen. The NACW relied on fundraisers and donations to fulfill the two goals of the Douglass Home. First, the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association intended "to preserve to posterity the memory of the life and character of the late

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<sup>91</sup> The MSFCWC did not publish their own newsletter. They were, however, very involved in the publication of the national and regional magazines. Additionally, Mississippi clubwomen served in several different national capacities. Thus, I feel comfortable using *The National Notes* and *The Southern Herald* while providing Mississippi-specific context and paying special attention to those articles written, published, or endorsed by Mississippians.

Frederick Douglass.” Additionally, the Association planned “to collect, collate, and preserve a historical record of the inception, progress, and culmination of the anti-slavery movement.”<sup>92</sup>

Mississippians participated in the endeavors surrounding the Douglass home. They contributed funds both personally contributed by members and fundraised collectively and read and shared the articles in *The National Notes*. In June 1925, Emma Burrus Miller, president of the Mississippi State Federation, reminded a national audience that the "zealous women present pledged themselves to stand by the Mary B. Tablet Memorial Fund." She assured NACW members that Mississippians would continue to send money until they met their quota.<sup>93</sup> As co-members in the Southeastern District of the NACW with Washington, D.C., Mississippi's black clubwomen also had access to special articles published in *The Southeastern Herald*, the district's publication. Other than the Frederick Douglass memorial and repository; however, the efforts of the NACW and its subsidiaries, including the Mississippi State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, were largely concentrated on local community buildings like old age homes and community centers. The Mississippi group, for instance, spent much of the interwar period working on a home for delinquent children. Rather than use their scant resources for buildings that did not serve their communities' various immediate needs in the name of preserving history, most NACW-affiliated groups focused on community-strengthening projects.

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<sup>92</sup> “The Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Assn., Inc.,” *The National Notes*, July & August 1926, 11 & 30.

<sup>93</sup> Emma B. Miller, “Editorial,” *The National Notes*, June 1925, 2.

The primary undertaking of the Mississippi State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs during the interwar period was procuring a home for delinquent boys and girls in Mississippi. At the MSCWC executive board meeting in April 1925, state leaders proposed that the organization attempt to obtain a charter in order to "secure and operate a Home for Delinquent Boys and Girls."<sup>94</sup> Around 1928, the MSFCWC had raised enough money to purchase property for the express purpose of establishing the Home. They bought Mt. Herman Seminary in Clinton, Mississippi, a school originally "founded about sixty years ago by Miss Sarah A. Dickey, a Northern white woman, for the education of the colored youth."<sup>95</sup> Having raised eight thousand dollars to purchase the seminary and another four thousand dollars to repair the buildings and grounds in preparation for children, the MSFCWC encountered a monumental setback when, after six years of work, the Home for Delinquent Boys and Girls burned to the ground. In a January 1932 article entitled "Mississippi Women Undaunted," author Anselm J. Finch of Prentiss, Mississippi, noted, "Despite the shadow of gloom which hovered over the faces of a few of the workers on account of the burning and the economic depression, the leaders of the organization refused to submit to any phase of cowardice."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> "Mississippi Federation's Project: Home for Delinquent Boys and Girls," *The Southern Herald*, July & August 1926, p. 37.

<sup>95</sup> Anselm J. Finch, "Mississippi Women Undaunted," *The National Notes*, January 1932, p. 11.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

According to the February 1926 edition of *The Southern Herald*, “Every Southern state either has a Home or is raising funds for a Home for Delinquent Girls.”<sup>97</sup> While every Southern state had a home for delinquent children focused on improving the future of African Americans, few had monuments or memorials dedicated to the past. This devotion to present and future conditions, embodied in the Homes, reflects a strategy of black clubwomen. Despite being in contact with some of Mississippi’s white clubwomen, whose strategies relied heavily on memorial efforts, the MSFCWC focused establishing a legacy of respectability, for contemporaries if possible, but especially for future generations of African Americans. Rather than attempt to make use of a memory tradition that highlighted deservedness like the UDC or contributions like the MFWC, the MSFCWC sought to establish a standard of behavior for African American women. The Homes became part of this national program throughout the interwar period.

As Mrs. Gertrude E. Rush of Des Moines, Iowa, explained, “The state, in providing a code of laws for the protection and guidance of its citizens, each year creates some new act, the violation of which is a crime, thus causing many persons to become lawbreakers.” Many in this new class of criminals were delinquent girls, a clear threat to the future respectability of African Americans, but Rush suggested, “it is a condition that is not wholly without a remedy.”<sup>98</sup> As is

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<sup>97</sup> Rebecca Stiles Taylor, “Southeastern Federation’s Program for 1925-26,” *The Southern Herald*, February 1926, p.14.

<sup>98</sup> Gertrude E. Rush, “Delinquent Girls,” *The National Notes*, July 1924, 11.

evident in the NACW motto, “lifting as we climb,” black clubwomen saw themselves as an integral part of that remedy. To that end, the members of the NACW expended a great deal of energy constructing homes for wayward youths and combatting the social ills they thought contributed to delinquency.

The NACW devoted resources to remembering the past, improving the present, and protecting the future. According to Sallie Stewart, president of the NACW from 1928-1930, however, “Raising the standard of home life, educating Negro children, raising the moral standard of the group are pivots on which we must move.”<sup>99</sup> These three most important tenets of the NACW clearly favored present and future. To achieve these goals, thereby saving delinquent girls and ensuring a better future, the NACW fought four specific problems. Environment, unfit mothers, permissive social leaders, and exalted immorality fed the growing phenomenon of delinquency.<sup>100</sup>

The goals and activities of the NACW and the MSFCWC illustrate the importance many black clubwomen placed on the present and future rather than the past. Though they devoted considerable time, effort, and resources to the Douglass Home, it was but one memorial site. Dozens of state organizations founded Homes for Delinquent Boys and Girls and the NACW made improving moral standards and education important components of the national program. Although monuments, especially for historically significant African Americans, were valuable,

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<sup>99</sup> Sallie Stewart, “President’s Page,” *The National Notes*, February 1929, 5.

<sup>100</sup> Rush, 11.



improving the lot of African Americans as a whole clearly took precedence over memorializing actions in the past.

When the NACW and its subsidiaries did publish memorial articles about individuals, they tended to be specific and honored women of the very recent past. State federations and individual clubs could submit memorial articles for publication alongside any material written by the publishing committee and Mississippi women often did so. These memorials served as templates of conduct for other clubwomen to follow. The authors first extolled the virtues of the deceased. For instance, Mrs. Bettie E. Woolfork of Yazoo City, Mississippi was described as “a woman of the highest moral standard” after her sudden death in July 1927, and Mrs. C.J. Calloway was “among the most respected and useful citizens of the town of Tuskegee” according to her memorial article.<sup>101</sup> The other primary description contained within these articles related to the accomplishments of the departed and their unfulfilled objectives. This functioned to inspire the surviving clubwomen to reach for the greatness attained by their predecessors and as a reminder of the activities in which they should continue to participate. In her article dedicated to Cynthia Holmes McCabe of Tacoma, Washington, Nettie J. Asberry remembered, “She was thoroughly ‘sold’ on the Federated club work. She believed that by and through its broad activities the race would become greatly uplifted and advance to a marked degree.”<sup>102</sup> In order to be like this woman who exhibited “exemplary qualities of womanhood,

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<sup>101</sup> “Memorials,” *The National Notes*, April 1928, 19. “Memorials,” *The National Notes*, April 1932, 8.

<sup>102</sup> Nettie J. Asberry, “Cynthia Holmes McCabe, Memorial,” *The National Notes*, May 1932, 10.

devotion and courage and Christian fortitude” the other clubwomen, then, should remain as dedicated to club work as McCabe.

The reactions to the deaths of Mary B. Talbert and Margaret Murray Washington best exemplified the inspirational interpretation that characterized the memorial articles of the NACW. Mary B. Talbert of Oberlin, Ohio served as the sixth president of the NACW. Under her leadership, the groups assumed control of the Frederick Douglass Historical and Memorial Association. She advocated prison reform and operated as National Director of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders. Talbert was also “a born leader of women.”<sup>103</sup> After her death in late 1923 at the age of fifty-seven, members of the NACW debated how best to honor her memory.

Throughout 1924 and in great detail at the 1924 National meeting in Chicago, NACW leaders sought proposals for “a suitable memorial to our departed friend and co-laborer, Mrs. Mary B. Talbert.”<sup>104</sup> According to Myrtle Foster Cook, Editor and Manager of *The National Notes*, “If Mary B. Talbert were here and speaking, she would say, ‘Go on, Good Friends, and complete the work I began. No greater memorial can you erect to me than to do at Cedar Hill the things I would have done.’”<sup>105</sup> Others also advocated linking Talbert’s memorial with her most memorable life work—the Douglass Home. In an unattributed article about the Douglass Home,

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<sup>103</sup> Davis, Elizabeth Lindsay, *Lifting As They Climb* Chicago: The National Association of Colored Women, 1933, 172-173.

<sup>104</sup> Brown, Hallie Q., *The National Notes*, July, 1924, 1.

<sup>105</sup> Cook, Myrtle Foster, *The National Notes*, July 1924, 3,

the author argued, “Loyalty to this Douglass Home obligation is loyalty to the memory of Mary B. Talbert.”<sup>106</sup> In 1925, this faction of the NACW achieved their goal when the NACW established the Mary B. Talbert Memorial Fund, the proceeds of which would go directly to the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association for repair and upkeep of the grounds at Cedar Hill. According to the Talbert model of memorialization, continuing and improving on their work WAS the best way to remember and honor a late clubwoman.

Margaret Murray Washington functioned as the third president of the NACW. As Booker T. Washington’s wife, she provided an invaluable service to the Tuskegee Institute and the women it served. Washington attended meetings for the African American women’s organizations that predated the NACW and served as a lifetime trustee of the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis claimed that Washington’s “greatest contribution to the National Association of Colored Women was the founding of the National Notes as the official organ of the N.A.C.W.”<sup>107</sup> Additionally, Washington helped found the Mississippi State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs before she became associated with the Alabama federation.

The NACW struggled to adequately honor Washington because of her prominence in the African American and clubwoman communities. She, like Talbert and other former NACW presidents, was listed in the beginning of every edition of *The National Notes* in the section

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<sup>106</sup> “The Douglass Home,” *The National Notes*, July, 1924, 6.

<sup>107</sup> Davis, Elizabeth Lindsay, *Lifting As They Climb* Chicago: The National Association of Colored Women, 1933, 122.

naming officers. Washington, as originator of *The National Notes*, also appeared under the magazine's heading as founder. Beyond these simple actions, members of the NACW memorialized Washington in several ways. In the months following her death in 1925, editors of *The National Notes* published several articles that suggested methods of honoring Washington's memory. These methods were variations of a mandate to continue her life's work. Mary McLeod Bethune, president of the NACW in 1925, directed clubwomen to "take up the burdens where they fell from her shoulders" so they could "carry on the work for which she gave her life."<sup>108</sup> Others claimed that members "ever ready to take a brace womanly stand for justice" paid tribute to Washington with their actions.<sup>109</sup> A great deal of the attention surrounding Washington derived from her relationship with Booker T. Washington. The June announcement of her death in *The National Notes* even listed "Widow of the Late Booker T. Washington" first among her accomplishments.<sup>110</sup> Bethune reminded readers that though a helpmate to her husband, Margaret Murray Washington was not "herself unseen." She pursued her own interests even as she helped her husband, demonstrating balance for other clubwomen.

Other than *The National Notes*, Washington's primary focus was education. She helped countless young African Americans, particularly young women through volunteer activities and her work at Tuskegee. In this, she demonstrated the ideal of the NACW motto, "Lifting As We

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<sup>108</sup> Mary McLeod Bethune, "Margaret Murray Washington, A Tribute," *The National Notes*, September 1925, 2.

<sup>109</sup> Sylvia Scott, "Miss Sylvia Scott's Appeal," *The National Notes*, October 1925, 5.

<sup>110</sup> "Margaret Murray Washington," *The National Notes*, June 1925, 1.

Climb” and according to club leaders, her dedication was to be emulated. In 1929, Washington still served as a model for other clubwomen devoted to education.<sup>111</sup> Another aspect of the remembrance of Washington as an educator focused on those she educated. According to Bethune, “There is in our country today a group of young women, cultured, efficient, given to unselfish service” who owed their demeanor to Washington.<sup>112</sup> These young women, representative of the present and future of the African American community, were the manifestation of Washington’s life’s work. According to the articles, the actions of these women on behalf of their race and sex proved the most appropriate memorial to a “representative colored woman” like Washington.<sup>113</sup>

The Mississippi State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs participated in the national memorialization of Margaret Washington, but they honored her in particular as a native Mississippian. In 1926 the MSFCWC decided to rename the Home for Delinquent Boys and Girls in Clinton the Margaret Murray Washington Home for Delinquent Boys and Girls. Like the national program, the MSFCWC efforts to memorialize Washington mixed her past with her contributions to the future. The MSFCWC honored her both by naming their most important endeavor after her and by continuing her work with African American youths.

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<sup>111</sup> “Margaret Murray Washington,” *The National Notes*, April 1929, 6.

<sup>112</sup> Bethune, *The National Notes*, September 1925, 2.

<sup>113</sup> “Margaret Murray, Washington,” *The National Notes*, April 1929, 6.

Though most articles in *The National Notes* focused on individuals and their efforts on behalf of a better collective future, the editors occasionally featured compositions that referred to a collective past, reminiscent of those produced by the UDC and MFWC. These essays about a collective past fell into two categories—those about black clubwomen and those concerning African Americans. From 1920 onward, articles about the collective memory of black clubwomen spoke primarily of the foundations laid and the work left undone. For example, in reference to women's suffrage, President Hallie Q. Brown reminded NACW members, "We are just from the finish line. Our labors have been crowned with success. We may shout with the multitude for victory achieved—but the war is not ended—the battle is not won."<sup>114</sup> Even when success seemed certain, NACW members were aware that as long as racial segregation and widespread disfranchisement existed, the work of their predecessors was incomplete. Sallie Stewart agreed by saying the NACW must "loose the next set of women who come, so that they may be free to build on the framework already started."<sup>115</sup> Although they "stood at the open door of a new era," work remained, specially suited for women according to Brown. She advised her readers that "It remains for women to work for higher moral standards, to inject onto the body politic the love and pity of her mother-heart, inspired by the lowly Christ, to help change our land into a God-fearing, a God-loving nation."<sup>116</sup> They won the legal conflict for the right to vote but most black clubwomen recognized the necessity of continued work to change political

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<sup>114</sup> Hallie Q. Brown, "President's Page," *The National Notes*, Oct.-Dec. 1920, 4.

<sup>115</sup> Sallie Stewart, "President's Page," *The National Notes*, January 1932, 3.

<sup>116</sup> Brown, *The National Notes*, Oct.-Dec. 1920, 4.

culture. NACW members shared their collective history with the larger African American community through speaking appearances and publication in national magazines and journals. In 1928, President Sallie Stewart addressed the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), an organization founded by Dr. Carter G. Woodson to shed light on the contributions of African Americans to American history. Her oration, entitled “Serious Thoughts on Race Appreciation,” contained her opinion on the benefits of the interracial work undertaken by clubwomen. She emphasized how much they had left to do to improve the status of African Americans.<sup>117</sup>

The NACW published updates from the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History as part of its efforts to share African American history and articulate a collective memory tradition. This group focused on challenging accepted histories of the United States by highlighting the contributions of African Americans. The NACW recommended book titles by ASNLH members for clubwomen to read and disburse in their communities.<sup>118</sup> An article in this category suggested a possible motive for the NACW concentration on the recent past and future. In a short piece from 1932 entitled “Study of Negro Popular Today,” the author noted, “We are emerging far enough from the dark cloud of slavery to see that we had a glorious past, and that there are in us glorious possibilities for the future.”<sup>119</sup> According to this author, their collective past was uncomfortable to recall and that anxiety affected interpretations of African American

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<sup>117</sup> “Untitled,” *The National Notes*, Dec. 1928, 5.

<sup>118</sup> “Books” *The National Notes*, Oct. 1925, 14.

<sup>119</sup> “Study of Negro Popular Today,” *The National Notes*, July 1932, 12.

history. By 1932, that response dwindled and a collective memory that highlighted positive contributions and achievements was emerging. Although the bulk of the NACW articles continued to explore the recent past, clubwomen participated in this community trend, especially through its relationship with ASNLH.

In all of their memorial efforts, African American women were less likely than their white counterparts to directly argue for voting rights. Rather than pointing out how capable or deserving their predecessors were, the NACW focused on the actions of present and future members. This is not to say that African American clubwomen did not push for electoral rights. In doing so, the NACW simply chose to couch their arguments in different terms. The black clubwomen of the NACW emphasized the process instead of the past. This approach fit the organization's overall program exemplified by the national motto, "Lifting As We Climb." Some clubwomen had greater access to an unimpeded voting process; others lived in states with extremely circumscribed voter eligibility. Nonetheless, the NACW urged "the women of the respective states of the Union to give their support to the enforcement of the Nineteenth Amendment."<sup>120</sup> Those who could vote did and encouraged and counseled those whose rights were still restricted. Black clubwomen could not depend on the enforcement of the Nineteenth Amendment, especially in Mississippi. For these women especially, ratification did not signify the conclusion of the fight for suffrage but rather the first step in a series of necessary victories to ensure the expansion of the franchise.

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<sup>120</sup> "Untitled," *The National Notes*. Jan.-March, 1922, 11.



## CONCLUSION

The middle class clubwomen of Mississippi concentrated their efforts in the interwar period to protect women's suffrage and expand the pool of eligible women voters. Through control of a particular memory tradition, these women's groups sought to demonstrate reasons why women's suffrage should have been accepted. Because of their distinct organizational goals and motivations for voting, the UDC, the MFWC, and the MSFCWC made use of different collective memories.

The Mississippi chapter of the UDC, because of their dedication to memorializing the women of the Confederacy and insistence that the vote be limited to white women, put forth a memory tradition that emphasized the deservedness of women. The MFWC, devoted to the improvement of their communities and the idea of responsible citizenship, stressed the contributions women could make with their entry into electoral politics. The MSFCWC, focused on respectability, social mobility, and the improvement of the plight of their race, concentrated on the connection between past actions and future advances.

Women's clubs in Mississippi achieved varying levels of success in their efforts to expand the female electorate during the interwar years. Primarily, these differences were determined by race. White women, particularly in the middle and upper classes, wielded the vote

more effectively than their African American counterparts in Mississippi. Due to race-based disfranchisement, African American women struggled to register to vote in Mississippi. In spite of the obstacles in their path, however, many black clubwomen successfully cast ballots in interwar elections.

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